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Coal industry protests environmental groups' permit petition

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About 200 coal industry employees and their supporters, including a number of miners from CONSOL Energy's Bailey Mine, staged a peaceful protest Monday in front of the offices of Center for Coalfield Justice in Washington. The rally, staged by the Secure Energy for America Association, was a result of a recent hearing on a petition filed by CCJ and the Sierra Club seeking to stop CONSOL's Bailey Mine from mining beneath two streams in and adjacent to Ryerson Station State Park in Greene County. SEAA field director Doug Steeber said the rally was held to try to "protect the jobs of families that they rely upon." He said SEAA represents more than 60 companies, including mines and others in the industry supply chain. On Dec. 13, the state Department of Environmental Protection issued a permit revision that allowed CONSOL to conduct full extraction mining under sections of Polen Run and Kent Run. The sections of the streams are in a 3,175-acre area east of and beneath Ryerson Station State Park for which CONSOL received a permit to mine in 2014 as part of its Bailey Lower East expansion. Additional DEP approval was required before mining was allowed under portions of certain streams. On Dec. 23, Pennsylvania Environmental Hearing Board Judge Steven Beckman issued an order scheduling a hearing after a petition was filed by CCJ and the Sierra Club seeking to stop mining beneath the two streams. A hearing is scheduled for today. Beckman's order has temporarily prevented the company from mining within 500 feet of Kent Run in the park but came too late

to apply to Polen Run, the second stream included in the environmental groups' petition. SEAA said in a news release that "CCJ and its allies have, at every step through legal and other strategies, attempted to shut down the Bailey mine complex and send its 2,000 employees and their families to the unemployment lines." On Monday, protesters carried a variety of placards, including one with a photo of the Bailey Mine complex that read, "Closing this mine? Losing our jobs isn't justice!" Protestors walked in a continuous loop up and down the block of South Main Street where CCJ's office is located. According to SEAA, the coal industry in Washington and Greene counties provides 7,350 jobs and adds nearly \$1.94 billion to the counties' economies. Frank Zaccone, 31, of South Franklin Township, a four-year employee of the mine, and his wife, Christina, said they were participating in Monday's rally because of the importance of the money he earns working on the longwall sections of the mine. "Without his work, I don't know how we could survive," said Christina, who is a stay-at-home mother of their two young daughters. Brennan Gallick, 33, also of South Franklin Township, and a manager at Bailey, said the intervention of CCJ and Sierra Club "is starting to affect families, real people." Greene County Commissioner Dave Coder, who attended the gathering along with commission Chairman Blair Zimmerman, said, "The people of Greene County have had enough of political radicals interfering with their ability to put food on the table for their families." Patrick Greuter, executive director of the Center for Coalfield Justice, and Tom Schuster, senior campaign representative of the Sierra Club, issued the following statement later Monday: "CONSOL has already destroyed Duke Lake, and with (the) latest proposed mining permit change they are beginning to destroy the remaining water features in Ryerson Station State Park. "Our goal is to defend and protect the park, which is a community resource used by thousands of local people. CONSOL has the option to protect Ryerson streams while maintaining current employment levels. If they are allowed to further damage this

park, what will be left for the community when the coal is gone?”Monday’s protest coincided with a report from the U.S. Energy Information Administration that showed coal production declined in 2016, with average coal prices below their 2015 level.The EIA said in its “Today in Energy” post on its website that U.S. coal production in 2016 is expected to total 743 million short tons, 17 percent lower than 2015, and the lowest level since 1978. It said falling production in 2016 “continues an eight-year decline from peak production in 2008, while production in all coal regions in the U.S. fell by at least 15 percent.”The EIA said lower natural gas prices, warmer-than-normal temperatures during the 2015-16 winter that reduced electricity demand, the retirements of some coal-fired generators and lower international coal demand have contributed to declining U.S. coal production.

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